

California State Prison offers construction program

By Marc Maloney
Staff writer

Construction careers could be in the futures of 16 inmates at California State Prison, Sacramento, who recently completed a revolutionary program designed to prepare them for life after lockup.

The 16 inmates at the prison, which is better known as Folsom Prison, are the first graduates of a new pre-apprenticeship program known as Career Technical Education-Carpentry. The program, the first of its kind in the country, addresses unemployment issues among parolees by teaching inmates construction skills they can use to find jobs after being paroled.

"This innovative training program is part of Governor Schwarzenegger's efforts to rehabilitate inmates in California's adult correctional institutions and is an important component in our renewed focus to assist inmates with the re-entry process," James Tilton, acting secretary for the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, said in a statement. "This is truly an investment in public safety, because employed parolees mean safer communities."

The training program also figures to benefit the construction industry, by providing newly-trained workers eager to establish a livelihood.

"There is a real need out there for this kind of labor," said Frank Losco, public affairs chief for the California Prison Industry Authority (PIA),



Photo courtesy of California Prison Industry Authority
CUTTING AN ANGLE for a frame, an inmate in the carpentry apprentice program practices using a skilsaw.

the state organization that provides productive job assignments for California's adult inmates. "Plus, we have a good relationship with the labor union, which allowed us to hire union carpenters to instruct these inmates."

During the six-month training program, participating inmates received extensive classroom instruction. They also got plenty of hands-on practice, which including helping to refurbish the prison's previously-vacant Green Valley Fire Camp 12.

The once dilapidated structure, which was being used as a storage

facility, now serves as a California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation/PIA training and engineering center, where inmates learn skills like concrete pouring, framing, drywall, taping and texturing, painting, roofing, and finish carpentry.

"This was a great opportunity to do some construction work on the prison grounds," explained Losco. "They were able to renovate a place that was very run-down and make it into a useful training center."

Some program graduates are being transferred to the PIA's modular building enterprise at the prison,

where they will manufacture portable structures that will be sold to state agencies.

After paroling, inmates will be eligible for placement in a full-scale apprenticeship program offered through the Carpenters Training Committee for Northern California, which can lead to jobs with construction companies that employ organized labor. The PIA is paying the initial union dues and providing a full set of tools to inmates who complete the program and enter Carpenters Local 46.